

**Written Statement of Mary Lou Aleskie, Executive Director
International Festival of Arts & Ideas**

Committee on Appropriations
February 17, 2010 Public Hearing

Senator Harp, Representative Geragosian, Senator DiBecella, Representative Miner and Members of the Appropriations Committee: Thank you for the opportunity to testify this evening.

My name is Mary Lou Aleskie and as Executive Director of the International Festival of Arts & Ideas I want to thank the committee on behalf of our Board of directors, our employees, businesses and the vast network of constituents we serve, for your past commitment to this proven private/public partnership that generates outstanding results for the State of Connecticut both culturally but more importantly today, economically.

I am here today to ask you to reject the Governor's proposed budget cut to the State's commitment to the Festival and sustain our funding at its current level of \$812,000 which already reflects a 20% cut in funding from just a year ago. The Governor's proposed budget which would cut an additional \$281,000, which would severely jeopardize our ability to continue our work and move forward with our Festival this June. The June 2009 Festival generated \$21.3 million in economic impact and hundreds of jobs for Connecticut residents. An event of this magnitude takes nearly two years to plan and produce each year. As we are only four months from the June 2010 Festival, any further cuts will result in widespread financial turmoil for the Festival, its vendors and all the many businesses and employees who rely on the Festival to keep its commitments.

On the strength of the commitment from our State, we have already identified nearly \$2M to produce the 2010 Festival, but if we cannot rely on commitments from our single largest partner, the State of Connecticut, it will be difficult and likely impossible for us to fulfill our obligations.

You have before you today a document entitled "The Case for the Festival". I want to highlight some of the important facts presented here. 103,350 people attended the 2009 Festival. They came from 121 CT towns and cities, 32 states and 18 foreign countries. We employed 162 seasonal workers and 300 CT artists in addition to our full time staff of 13. The Festival booked and paid for 789 hotel rooms. We did this on the strength of our longstanding partnership with the State.

There are very few success stories in our economy today. The Festival is a proven asset. The Festival has been prudent in its planning. We have already managed the 20% reduction of State support and navigated an additional 15% reduction in contributions. And we maximized return as much as possible through extraordinary collaborations, international investment and creative approaches to producing. We have even endured

the volatile nature of the State's payment schedule which has put additional strain on our cash flow by delaying payments and arbitrarily reducing payment amounts without notice. But we need the continued consistent and reliable support of the Connecticut Legislature and its members to help us through this difficult time without any further erosion of our capacity to serve this State and its citizens.

Adopting the Governor's budget or any other plan that further reduces budgeted funds for the Festival will not only jeopardize the Festival and all it represents but it will create widespread economic turmoil for every business, employee, restaurant, hotel, and the like who rely on the Festival as an important economic generator while at the same time negatively impacting the taxes paid by all those who benefit.

I want to cite a recent study commissioned by the Greater New Haven Chamber of Commerce on The Value of Non-profits to the Regional Economy. "In the for-profit sector, money is brought into the region through sales. In the non-profit sector, revenue comes from national and global sources through grants, gifts, contributions and memberships. When those funds are spent here, they benefit residents throughout Greater New Haven. Bringing new revenue into the region is more desirable than churning the money that is already here."

With 65% of our visitors coming from outside of New Haven and an additional 15% coming from outside of our State, this Festival is a major driver of NEW revenues to our State and region.

Please do not turn away from one of the few proven opportunities we know to positively contribute to our economy and our spirit. With all due respect to this Committee, we need you to hold strongly to the values you embraced in championing this State budget in the Fall and continue your support for this important Connecticut asset.

Thank you for listening.



The Case for the Festival

Importance of Festival's Funding Request: We urge you to continue to support the fulfillment of our current contract for \$812,750 issued in response to the line item you voted for the International Festival of Arts & Ideas in the FY2010 budget. The contracted amount reflects the Governor's recent 5% rescission. This funding is necessary to sustain the Festival, a nationally and internationally recognized cultural organization committed to excellence in the arts & humanities, to community-building, and to economic development. The Festival, a 501 (c) (3) educational charity, has provided a 14-year continuity of programming to our region and State and has become a driving force in the region's economy. We have already reduced our budget based on a reduced contract and anticipated reduction in contributed support. The Festival needs the continuation of anticipated funding at this time to weather the crisis without impacting the Festival's fundamental ability to deliver the multi-layered program that our region and State have come to recognize as essential to our cultural and economic vitality.

Funding for the Festival is an investment that yields tremendous value

Our 14 year record of success has been fueled by a dynamic private and public partnership that now leverages \$2.50 from private sources for every \$1 of public funding. Increasingly, the Festival attracts direct investments from foreign ministries of culture who send dollars into Connecticut with their artists.

Statistical Overview: Each June since its 1996 inaugural year, the Festival has produced a festival of world-class artists and thinkers. Nearly 1.5 million audience members have enjoyed 3,606 events by 18,082 artists from the region, the nation and 75 foreign countries. The Festival is a unique event in the Northeast, with a dual focus on both arts and ideas.

The Festival:

Generates an Annual Economic Impact of \$21.3 Million

- Festival-related business, seasonal employment, and audience expenditures as calculated by Quinnipiac University for the June 2009 event
- 103,350 people attended the 15-day event, dining in our restaurants and shopping.
- The Festival booked and paid for 800 hotel nights for artists during the 2009 Festival.

Generates Jobs

- Provides 162 seasonal jobs ranging from entry level to highly skilled positions, in addition to a year-round and full-time staff of 13.
- Hired over 300 Connecticut artists in 2009, in addition to providing community engagement opportunities for 46 community partners in the "Favorite Poem Project" and over 50 local students, community members, dancers and singers in the world premiere of "Really Real."

Promotes Connecticut as a Tourist Destination

- Festival's 2009 audience came from 121 CT cities and towns, 32 states and 18 foreign countries.
- Attracts national media coverage from publications such as *The New York Times*, *Variety*, *Time Out New York*, *American Theatre Magazine*, *Philadelphia Inquirer* and *USA Today*.
- Ranked among top 100 destinations in the North America by the American Bus Association.

Provides Free Family Programming

- 83% of the Festival's 2009 events were free.
- Provides cultural enrichment to socially and economically diverse audiences.